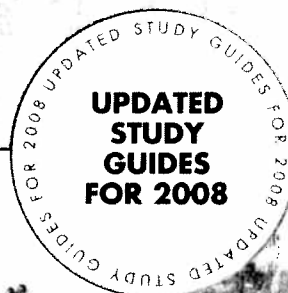


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The Unification of Italy

1815–70 THIRD EDITION



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HODDER
EDUCATION

1

Introduction: The Unification of Italy

POINTS TO CONSIDER

In 1815 'Italy' was merely a geographical expression, and very few people believed that one day the peninsula would become a nation state. Yet by 1861 almost all of Italy had been unified. This chapter should be regarded as a curtain-raiser to the drama of Italian unification, providing essential background knowledge. It looks at three different periods:

- Pre-Napoleonic rule, largely by Austrian rulers
- French rule under Napoleon
- The Restored Monarchies

Finally, the chapter sketches an outline of the process by which, after 1848, 'Italy' was formed as a political entity, and of the main interpretations that have been put forward by contemporaries and historians to explain what happened. This will allow you to form a 'mental map' of the key events and ideas, enabling you to follow the next, more detailed, chapters with greater ease.

Key dates

1796 Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Italy

1815 Napoleon defeated at Waterloo

The Congress of Vienna: Austria to be dominant in Italy

The 'Restored Monarchs' began to return to their Italian states

Key question

What were the main political divisions in Italy?

1 | Pre-Napoleonic Italy

Around the start of the nineteenth century, many Europeans considered that Italy was the heartland of world civilisation. Twice, during the Roman Empire and at the time of the Renaissance, it had dominated Europe, first politically and then culturally. Yet the times had sadly changed, and now Italy had declined and was languishing under foreign rule or petty dictators. Italy was now more an art gallery and a museum, some believed, than a modern state.

In 1796, when Napoleon's army had overrun Italy, the peninsula had comprised a complicated patchwork of states and

Key date

Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Italy: 1796

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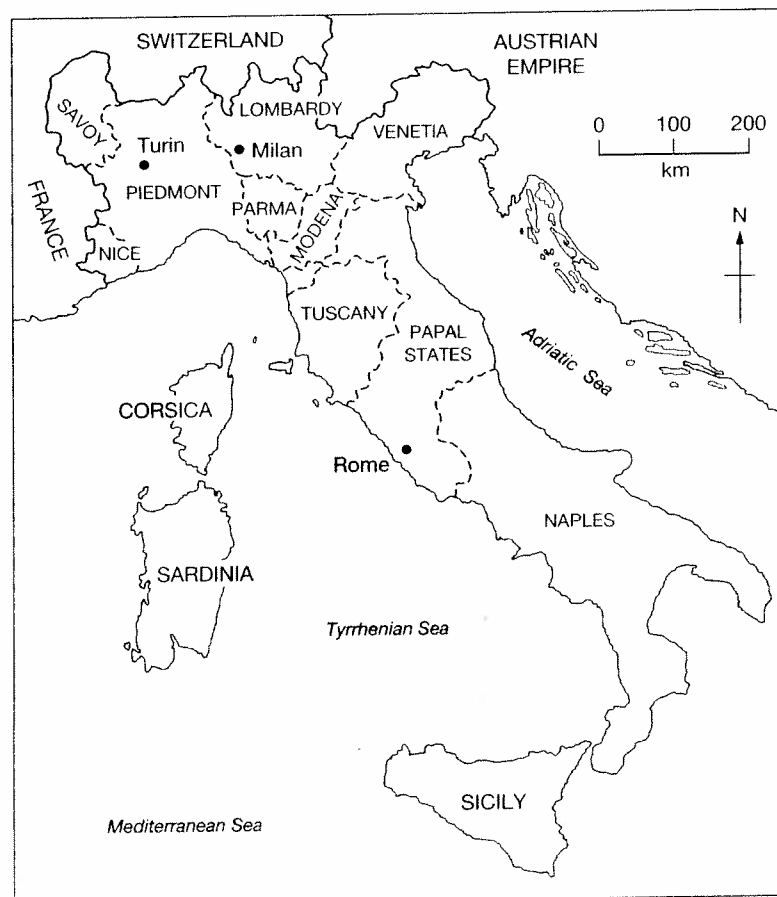
principalities (see the map below). The main bodies of this complex mosaic were:

- The northern state of Piedmont, ruled by the House of Savoy from its capital in Turin. In 1720 the Duke of Savoy had acquired the island of Sardinia and the title of King. This joint state had originally been known as 'The Kingdom of Sardinia' or 'Sardinia-Piedmont', but in the nineteenth century was generally referred to simply as Piedmont.
- The northern state of Lombardy, which was ruled by local representatives of the Austrian Empire, supported by the Austrian army. It was one of the most advanced parts of Italy economically and its capital, Milan, had a population of around 130,000.
- Venetia, governed according to a constitution that had changed little since the Renaissance, was dominated by its local aristocracy. Austria had great influence in the area.
- The Central Duchies, of Tuscany, Modena and Parma. They were governed by their own dukes, but again Austria was very influential, so much so that they have been called **satellites** of Austria. The ruling dynasty in Tuscany, for instance, the House of Lorraine, was part of the Habsburg family, which ruled in Austria.

Satellites

Weak states dependent on or controlled by a more powerful country.

Key term



Italy c1796, showing the main regions.

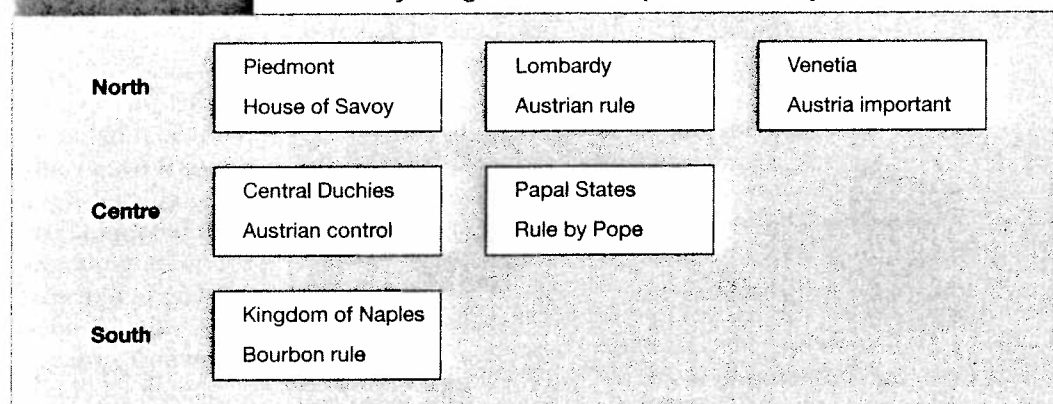
Key term

Viceroy

A ruler exercising authority on behalf of a king or queen.

- The Papal States, covering most of central Italy, were governed by the Pope. Economically the region was weak, and militarily it relied on support from other Catholic countries.
- The Kingdom of Naples, ruled by the Bourbon family, constituted the largest but also the poorest region in Italy. From Naples, the largest city in Italy, the king also ruled Sicily, via a **viceroy**, which was poverty stricken. The combined kingdom was often referred to as 'The Kingdom of the two Sicilies'.

Summary diagram: Pre-Napoleonic Italy

**Key question**

What were the main effects of French rule in Italy?

2 | French Rule under Napoleon

The French attacked the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia in 1792, acquiring Nice and Savoy. A few years later, in 1796, **Napoleon Bonaparte** gained control of the army in Italy and, after a war with the Austrians in Lombardy, soon took over the whole peninsula. In 1805 Napoleon crowned himself King of Italy.

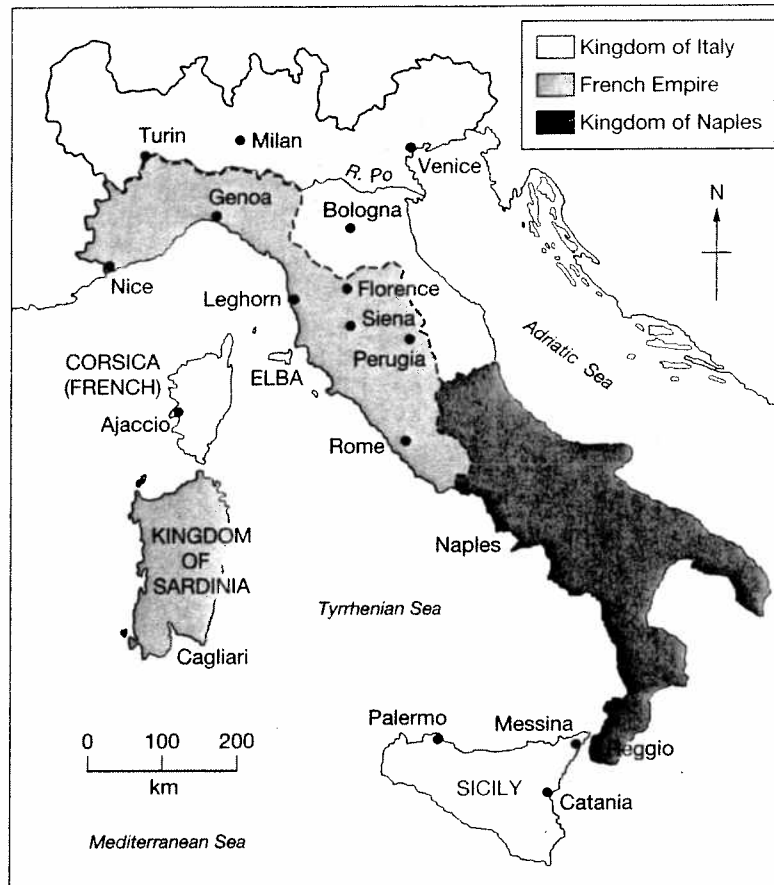
Napoleon made a series of changes which simplified political boundaries. In 1798 he did away with the old complicated pattern of states and divided most of the country into just four separate republics. In 1810 he divided the country again, but this time into just three parts (see the map on page 4):

- One third was annexed to France and treated as part of the French Empire. This comprised the north-west portion of Italy, including Piedmont, together with the Central Duchies and the Papal States.
- Another third became known as the Kingdom of Italy. This comprised the regions of Lombardy, Modena, Bologna, Romagna and Ferrara. Napoleon was king but his stepson ruled as viceroy.
- The remaining third was the Kingdom of Naples, but it did not include Sicily, which was now controlled by Britain, and the ruling dynasty was no longer the Bourbons. Instead Napoleon's brother, Joseph, became king.

Key figure

Napoleon Bonaparte 1769–1821

Joined the French army in 1785 and made a name for himself as a brilliant commander in wars against the British and the Austrians. He instituted a military dictatorship in France in 1799 and crowned himself Emperor, as Napoleon I, in 1804. He was forced to abdicate, after a series of military defeats, in 1814.



The tripartite division of Napoleonic Italy c1810.

Life under French rule

Historians are very divided over what life was like for the Italian people under French rule, not surprisingly, perhaps, since almost 20 million people then lived in the Italian peninsula. Some believe that 'Italy's experience during the period was traumatic from every point of view' and that the 'brutality and irreligion of the French soldiery' were largely to blame. Certainly a great many men were required for the French army and a great deal of money was needed to train, equip and feed the French soldiers and the Italian conscripts. No fewer than 27,000 Italian soldiers accompanied Napoleon to Russia in 1812, but only 1000, many of them badly wounded, survived to return home on foot, having lost all their horses and cannon in the campaign.

Italians deeply resented the increased conscription of their young men into the army, along with the high taxation needed to make good the loss of so many soldiers, horses and weapons. War, though, was Napoleon's life and as much as 60 per cent of tax revenue collected in Italy by the French authorities was used to fund military expenditure even in peacetime. Nevertheless, the experiences of different groups in Italy undoubtedly varied, as we can see by examining different sectors of Italian society under French rule.

Key question

What were the positive and what were the negative features of French rule in Italy?

Temporal power

The worldly authority of the Pope, as ruler of the Papal States.

Spiritual authority

The religious power of the Pope, as head of the Catholic Church.

Code Napoléon

A set of civil laws, formulated in 1804, which gave France a single legal system and attempted to promote the principle of equal rights for all citizens. (Women, it should be noted, were classified as minors not as citizens.)

The Church

The Roman Catholic Church was one body that suffered severely. Its power was greatly reduced and two Popes were actually imprisoned in France. In 1809 its **temporal power** was declared to be at an end. The Papal States were to be governed by the French and not by the Pope and his cardinals. This did not affect the Pope's **spiritual authority**, for he remained head of the Church, but by 1814 almost all monasteries had been closed down by the French. In addition, the Church lands were sold off – and not in the small lots the peasants hoped for and might have been able to buy, but in large lots to landowning noble families or to wealthy merchants from the towns who wanted to set up as landed gentry.

The wealthy

Whether the families of well-to-do noble landowners and of middle-class bankers and merchants suffered under French rule is unclear. Accounts vary widely, but many were written as memoirs long after the events they describe and so may not be entirely accurate. The families of two noblemen who later became Prime Ministers of Piedmont, Camillo Cavour and Massimo d'Azeglio, are good examples. The Cavour family seem to have done well out of the purchase of Church lands, while d'Azeglio, in memoirs written nearly half a century later, complained that his family was ruined under French rule.

Urban groups

There were substantial benefits from French rule for most of the 10 per cent or so Italians who lived in towns. The majority of these were professional men and their families – well-to-do middle-class merchants, lawyers, bankers, apothecaries, doctors and government officials. Lower in the social scale, tradesmen, artisans and craftsmen also profited from the increased prosperity of the middle class as changes introduced by Napoleon brought financial and business advantages.

External customs barriers were simplified and internal trade barriers between the Italian states were swept away, weights and measures were standardised, tax collection was reorganised, new and better roads were built and transport was improved. The *Code Napoléon* was introduced nationally to replace the earlier hotchpotch of separate state laws, and new local government districts were set up along French lines. Industry was encouraged (so that France might benefit from buying cheap Italian goods) and vaccination against smallpox was made available. Street lighting in towns was introduced. At first this caused unexpected problems. It seems that in Milan this new attempt to make the streets safer at night was not appreciated: the flickering oil lamps are said to have 'quite blinded the pedestrians', making them easier targets for pickpockets and other criminals. But in the long run there were undoubted benefits.

The most important development for the future was probably the introduction by the French of a two-chamber representative

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government in each of the states. Many young Italian men were able to gain experience of politics and government in these 'parliaments'. Italians absorbed French ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity, and some accepted that men should be citizens of a state rather than subjects of a king. Others were trained in leadership as officers in the French army of occupation or in the **conscripted**, well-trained Italian army of 80,000 men. These experiences were to stand both groups in good stead in the years of revolution and nationalist struggle.

The peasants

Meanwhile peasant families, who made up between 80 and 90 per cent of Italians in the early nineteenth century, continued to live a life far removed from that of the **élite** middle-class families of Piedmont or Tuscany, or the old aristocracy of southern Italy. Italian peasant families, ignored in their lifetime and long dismissed by historians as uneducated, unimportant, non-political and unworthy of study, are often now the focus of new research.

Marriage customs

The Italian historian Marzio Barbagli has made an intensive study of the ages at which men and women married within the peasant communities in different parts of Italy and whether they set up their own home or lived with parents. In the rural south, Italian couples married comparatively young, women on average at 19 years of age and men shortly before they were 25. They were able to do this because the parents of a girl about to marry often supplied her with '**dowry** gifts', including a bed, clothes and linen. Where the families were too poor this was usually impossible. Nevertheless, a landless labourer would often marry and set up a household 'with a few pence of his own, a few from his wife and whatever he can borrow and at once start a family'.

In Sardinia, because her father did not give a dowry, a girl had to make with her own hands the things she needed. As she had very little time during the day, the work took a long while to complete and the age at which she was free to marry was consequently higher than elsewhere. Many young men were never able to marry at all because it was customary in some areas that the head of the family must remain a bachelor.

Occupations

Most peasants lived as they had always done, in dark, damp, poorly furnished cottages that they shared with their livestock for warmth at night. They tilled their fields with wooden ploughs, perhaps with the help of a horse, perhaps not, and carried their crops home on their backs, since over most of rural Italy a wheeled cart was unknown. Unfortunately, the most easily and therefore most commonly grown crop was maize. When eaten in large quantities as the staple diet it results in vitamin deficiency and gives rise to the terrible disease **pellagra**. In one year in the early nineteenth century 95,000 cases were reported among peasants in Venetia alone.

← **Key question**
In what ways were the peasants affected by French rule?

Conscripted

Forcibly enlisted into the army.

Élite

The most important and influential groups in a society, usually those who are wealthy and well educated.

Dowry

Property or money presented by a bride or her family to her husband.

Pellagra

A disease causing skin complaints, diarrhoea and madness that often ends in suicide.

Key terms

Rather than remain almost permanently on the verge of starvation and the prey of bad weather and failed crops, many young men left the family farms, took to the hills and became bandits. Many young women moved for work into the town, where they often found instead diseases such as typhoid, cholera, diphtheria and tuberculosis spread by overcrowding, with as many as 80 people in a house, a non-existent sewage system and a lack of clean drinking water.

Many women in both town and country discovered, if they did manage to find a job or to obtain work which could be done at home, that it was impossible to keep their babies and often abandoned them at the nearest **foundling** hospital. There a container set in the front door allowed a baby to be left with some sort of identification. If conditions improved the mother might return and reclaim her child at a later date, months or sometimes years later. By then the child might no longer be alive, for the death rate in foundling hospitals was high.

If peasant women remained in the countryside, they were expected not only to help their husbands in the fields and to feed and care for their families, but also to make a little money at home. Often they would become **outworkers** for some urban merchant by spinning or weaving, sewing shirts or, with the help of the children, raising silk worms and reeling off the silk from the resulting cocoons for the major Italian manufacturing industry of silk weaving.

Key terms

Foundling

An infant abandoned by its mother and cared for by others.

Outworkers

Those provided with work by a factory but doing it at home.

Key question

What was the significance of French rule for nationalist movements in Italy?

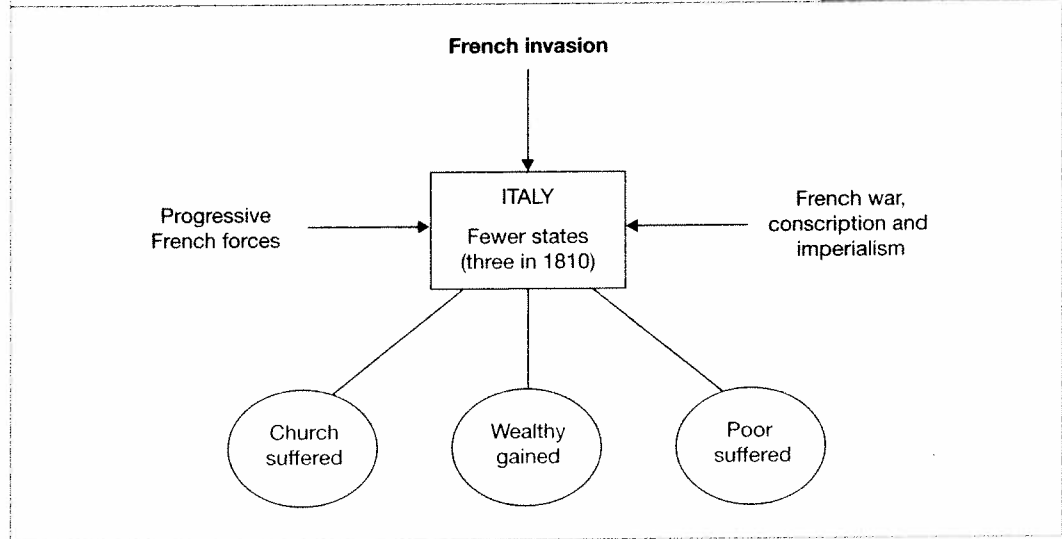
Conclusion

The effects of French rule in Italy were paradoxical. Many educated Italians were inspired by the ideas the French brought with them, some wanting to imitate France by modernising Italy and even founding an Italian nation state. On the other hand, French rule all too often fell lamentably short of the standards it aspired to. Heavy-handed French imperialism inspired a wish in many Italians to overthrow French domination. The question was, could this be achieved? If so, would it be done by peaceful methods, including debate and agreement, or would violence be needed?

Research on the Italian peasantry has revealed that historians' focus on 'high politics' and on the process that led to unification can easily mislead us into thinking that this preoccupied most Italians. But such was certainly not the case. For most Italians life was a constant struggle for survival, and politics seemed entirely irrelevant. Two key questions arise from this:

- Could nationalists mobilise the peasant masses to take an interest in unification? If so, nationalism might well develop into a force to be reckoned with.
- Could politicians – either before or after unification – take the constructive measures that would raise the standard of living for ordinary Italians? If not, a true democracy was unlikely to evolve.

Summary diagram: French rule under Napoleon



3 | The Restored Monarchies

In 1815 French control of Italy came to an end with the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo and his final exile to St Helena. All his boundary changes were set aside. The European powers, meeting at the Congress of Vienna, decided to return Italian state boundaries to more or less what they had been in the middle of the eighteenth century before Napoleon's arrival.

The main divisions of Italy would be as follows (see the map on page 9):

- In the north, Piedmont was restored to its king, Victor Emmanuel I. His territory was now enlarged to include Savoy, recovered from France, and also **Genoa**.
- Elsewhere in the north, Lombardy and Venetia were now joined together, under a new viceroy controlled from Vienna.
- The Central Duchies (Tuscany, Modena and Parma) were returned to the control of Austrian-appointed local rulers. For instance, Ferdinand III, the brother of the Austrian Emperor, became the Grand Duke of Tuscany.
- The Papal States were returned to the control of the Pope, although now Austrian armed forces were to be stationed there.
- In the south, King Ferdinand I was restored to the throne, controlling both Naples and Sicily. He was in theory independent, but he accepted that no important change would be made to his government without Austria's approval.

Key question

Was life for Italians better or worse under the Restored Monarchies than under the French?

Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo: June 1815

The Congress of Vienna returned Italy to its old rulers: 1815

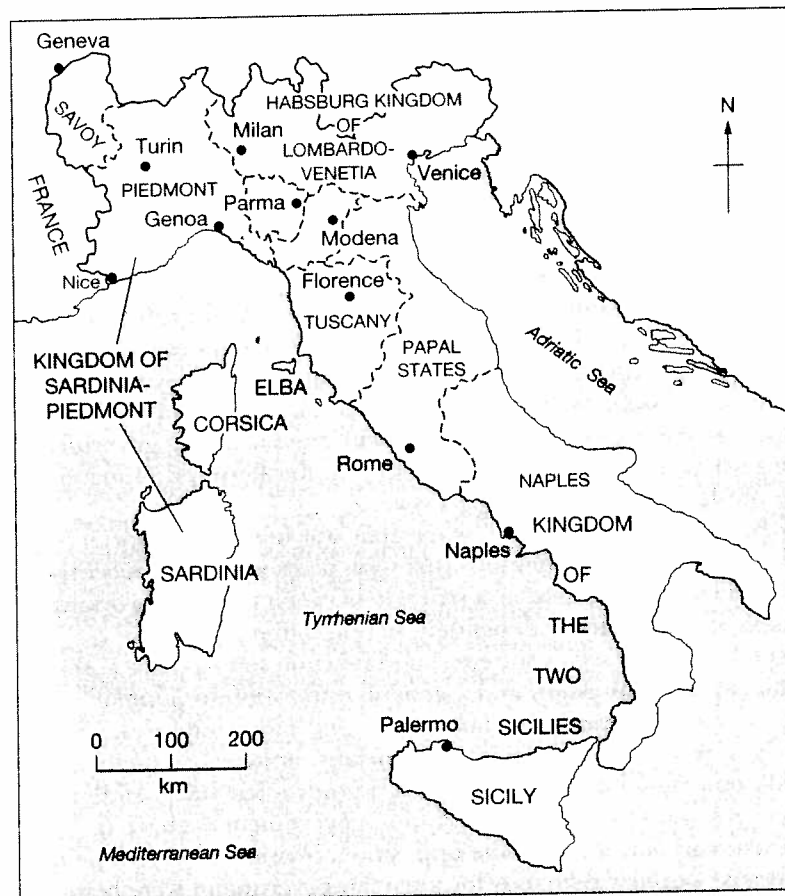
Genoa

The Vienna Settlement of 1815 gave Piedmont control of the former republic of Genoa. This was of great commercial benefit to Piedmont, as Genoa was an important port. But the Genoese were far from impressed, resenting the loss of their former political and commercial independence.

Key dates

Key term

Italy after the
Congress of Vienna,
1815.



Key figure

**Prince Clemens
Metternich**
1773–1859

The dominant figure in the Austrian government from 1809 to 1848. He was determined to suppress liberal and nationalist movements and regarded dominance in Italy as essential to Austria's security.

Key date

The 'Restored Monarchs' began to return to their Italian states: 1815

What all this amounted to was an Italy largely controlled by Austria, as the Congress of Vienna had intended. The Congress had decided that, after a period of upheaval, stability was needed. That meant a return to the old ways. Above all, future French invasions had to be prevented, and that meant Austria must control most of the peninsula. This was very much in accordance with the plans of the Austrian Chancellor, **Metternich**, one of the key figures in the Congress. He wished 'to extinguish the spirit of Italian unity and ideas about constitutions'. As he said at the time, 'Italian affairs do not exist'.

Old rulers return

In 1815 the old ruling families were clamouring to be allowed to return to Italy from the exile in which most of them had lived out the Napoleonic era. They were anxious, now that their old state boundaries had been restored, to return to their previous lifestyles. It was not long before kings, princes, dukes and duchesses were finding their way back to Italy.

Their return was generally welcomed by the landowning nobility of the countryside, by the well-to-do middle class in the towns and, especially, by the Pope and the Roman Catholic

Church. For all these it signalled a welcome return to the old ways.

Yet with very few exceptions the peasants, who made up about 90 per cent of the population, neither knew nor cared what was happening outside their own villages. Whether it was the French, the Austrians or a Restored Monarch who ruled was of little or no importance to them in their struggle for survival.

Life under the Restored Monarchs

The **Restored Monarchs** have long been seen by historians as trying to turn the clock back to pre-Napoleonic times in an attempt to return to absolute government. Hence they have been judged as essentially **reactionary**. Their alliance with the Church, and also their general friendliness with the Habsburg government in Austria, has led historians to write off the Restored Monarchs as old-fashioned and unprogressive.

Between 1815 and 1861, when Italy was unified, the social disturbances and revolutions that took place were until recently described by historians as a struggle between progress (working to make Italy a united independent nation, often through membership of secret societies) and reaction (out-of-date absolute rule, brutal oppression and a general opposition to popular nationalist ambitions for Italian unity and independence).

New research by **revisionist historians**, however, suggests a different situation. They argue that in only a few states and on only a few occasions did Restoration governments behave in a reactionary way. Most of the opposition, revisionists say, came not because popular demands for a part in government were being ignored: the real trouble was just the opposite. It was not because monarchs were keeping too much power in their own hands, but because they were modernising their governments and setting up a central administration to carry out everyday business. Admittedly most Restoration governments used censorship, police surveillance and military force to deal with unrest, but so did most other European states in the early nineteenth century.

Examples of **progressive** Restoration governments include the following:

- In Tuscany, Ferdinand III was no reactionary. He improved education, reorganising the universities of Pisa and Siena and spending more on the education of girls. He also expanded health facilities and refused to allow the **Jesuits** entry to the Duchy. Above all, he allowed freedom of expression to a degree not seen elsewhere in Italy. Hence the journal *Antologia*, founded in 1821, began to flourish. Its contributors included some of the great intellectual figures of the century, including the leading Italian nationalist, Giuseppe Mazzini. As a result, Florence became, in most people's judgement, the cultural and in some ways the political centre of Italy. Ferdinand would probably have granted a constitution if Metternich had allowed him to.

Key question
Did life for Italians change under the Restored Monarchs?

Restored Monarchs
The rulers whom the Congress of Vienna allowed to return to Italy.

Reactionary
Favouring a return to previous political conditions and being opposed to political progress.

Revisionist historians
Those who disagree with generally accepted historical interpretations and seek to overturn them by arguing differently.

Progressive
Forward looking, favouring reform.

Jesuits
Members of the Society of Jesus, a religious order founded in the sixteenth century who were famed for their extreme loyalty to the Papacy.

- In Parma, Duchess Marie-Louise was, by the standards of the time, another enlightened ruler. She repealed the *Code Napoléon* (see page 5) but replaced it with something very similar and would allow no policy of blind reaction.

There were, however, four states that were indeed backward looking: Piedmont, Modena, the Papal States and Naples.

Piedmont

When King Victor Emanuel I returned to Piedmont in 1815 he set out to turn the clock back to pre-Napoleonic days. Middle-class officials in the government and law courts, and non-noble officers in the army who had been appointed under Napoleon, were dismissed and replaced by members of the old noble families. In addition, the *Code Napoléon* was done away with and the former eighteenth-century laws, with their special privileges for the nobility, were restored. The king even went to the lengths of ploughing up parks and tearing down gaslights because they had been introduced by the French.

The old customs barriers were reintroduced, the use of the new roads built by the French was actively discouraged, control of education was handed back to the Roman Catholic Church, and the Jesuits, who had been exiled by Napoleon, were invited to return. Nobles were given back their lands and, at the same time, the old anti-Jewish laws restricting ownership of property were reintroduced and Jews were once again ordered to remain in the **ghettos** instead of being allowed to move freely about the country.

Modena

The return of the Habsburg Duke Francis IV to Modena in 1815 heralded a similar attempt to return to the pre-Napoleonic era. Italians holding government offices under Napoleon were removed, being replaced by members of the nobility. The Jesuits returned. Francis also married the daughter of Victor Emmanuel of Piedmont, a man whose rule he much admired. He hated all **liberals**, and yet he also had quarrels with Austria, which confined his rule to the small duchy of Modena.

The Papal States

A series of hardline Popes, known collectively as 'the zealots', between them established a tight hold on government, education, culture and politics within the Papal States.

All central and local government was in the hands of priests, the **lay population** having almost no say in what happened. The *Code Napoléon* was abolished, censorship was strictly imposed and all opposition forcibly repressed. The **Inquisition** sometimes used torture against those whose ideas were deemed too modern. It was even forbidden to say that the earth revolved round the sun, since the Church decreed otherwise! Religious persecution increased, and toleration of any other belief than Roman Catholic doctrine was forbidden.

Key terms

Ghettos

Special quarters in Italian towns outside which Jews were forbidden to live.

Liberals

Members of the élite who wanted progressive change: often constitutional government, the guarantee of individual freedoms and free trade.

Lay population

People who are not members of the clergy.

Inquisition

A much-feared tribunal for prosecuting and punishing heresy, founded in the thirteenth century.

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Jews, in particular, came in for harsh treatment. Their children could be taken away to be brought up as Catholics by the Church if it could be shown, or sometimes even if it was alleged, that anyone – a friend, a servant, or a relative – had baptised them secretly. The seizing from his home in the ghetto of a young Jewish boy, Edgar Mortara, who may or may not have been baptised by a simple-minded servant girl, created a great sensation which helped, despite the opposition of the Pope, to bring the practice of kidnapping to an end.

Developments in communication were hindered by the Pope's refusal to allow railways and the telegraph within his lands.

In this period the Papal States had the unenviable reputation of being the most backward and oppressive of all the Italian states. They were also among the most economically poor, with unemployment and begging being common.

Naples

The Bourbon king, Ferdinand I, returned as King of Naples in 1815. The following year he cancelled the Sicilian constitution of 1812, which had allowed the people a say in government. In future, he declared, Sicily would be governed as part of the kingdom of Naples. Liberals and **radicals** joined together to call for a new constitution, but the king refused their demand.

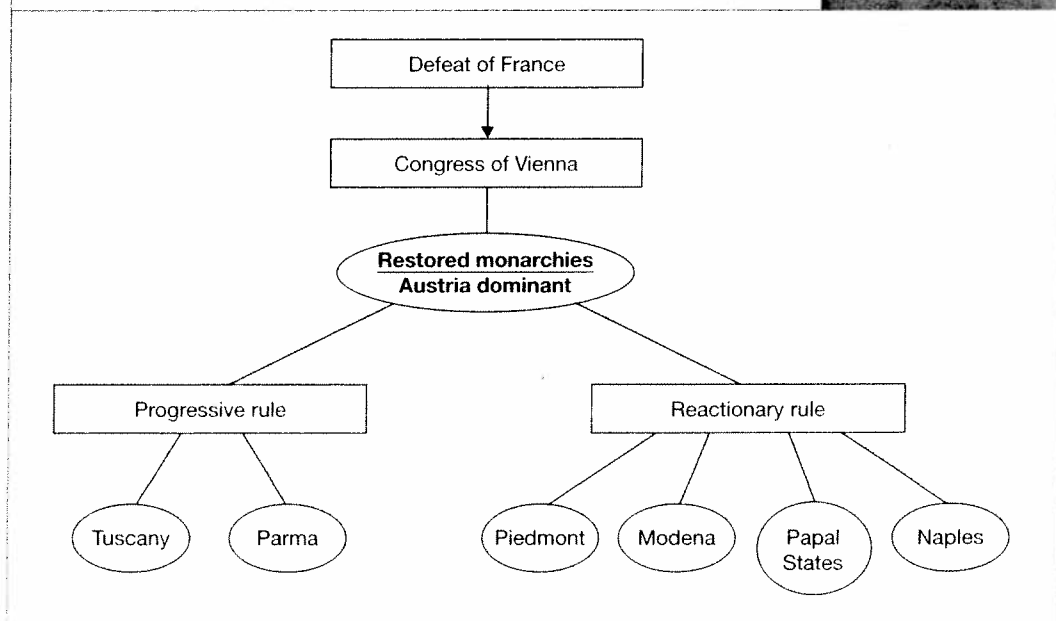
In Naples too, Ferdinand's rule was oppressive, cruel and reactionary, and there were very few economic successes that perhaps might have compensated for the stifling political atmosphere. In 1820, in Naples and Sicily, there began the first of a long, drawn-out series of revolutions (which are dealt with in Chapter 2).

Radicals

Reformers who wanted greater change than the liberals, including the overthrow of monarchies.

Key term

Summary diagram: The Restored Monarchies



Key question

What were the basic 'ingredients' that produced unification?

4 | Unification: A Brief Overview

Napoleon had said, 'Italy is one nation. Unity of customs, language and literature must at a period more or less distant unite her inhabitants under one government, and Rome without doubt will be chosen by the Italians as their capital'.

In the early 1800s this scenario was only a dream for Italian nationalists. By the 1860s the dream had come true. How it happened is the subject of the rest of this book.

Key question

Why did nationalism grow in nineteenth-century Italy?

Nationalism

Several factors were involved in the process of unification. One was the growth of national feeling. In the period after French rule, intellectuals became more interested in Italian history and culture, gaining more confidence that Italians were in fact a cultural nation. Philosophers decided around this time that language embodied the distinctive essence of a national group – the special spirit that bound people together and made them a nation, distinct from outsiders. Admittedly there was no single Italian language, but neither was there quite the linguistic variety in the Italian peninsula that some have believed. Instead, the variations were rather **dialects** than entirely new languages. In addition, one of these dialects – Tuscan Italian – was easily the most popular form of written language.

Yet several important issues were unresolved, all relating to the strength of Italian nationalism:

- Could local discontent, especially with the existing rulers, be converted into enthusiasm for a new Italian state?
- Could Italian nationalism override loyalty to a particular region or state?
- Just how much mass support could Italian nationalism generate? Would it involve only the small intellectual élite, or would it receive support from industrial workers and peasants? The latter constituted the great majority of Italian people, and nationalism would be all the weaker if it could not generate truly mass support.
- How many nationalist parties and groups would there be, and what would they stand for? Should a new Italian state be a republic or a monarchy? Clearly the more alternatives there were, the less cohesion and the less strength the nationalist movement would have. Unless there was unity, there could be no real strength.
- Would nationalism be strong enough to overcome the existing, mostly Austrian, rulers in Italy, or would the Italians need to enlist international support to overcome the stranglehold of Austria on the Italian peninsula?

Dialect

The form of a language found in a particular region.

Revolutions

Three sets of revolutions occurred in Italy: in 1820–1, 1831–2 and 1848–9. The demands of the rebels in 1820 and 1831 were moderate protests against oppressive rule rather than attempts to

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forge an Italian nation. They also failed totally, owing to divisions among themselves, lack of mass support and the might of the Austrian army. But in 1848 there was initial success, as the existing rulers often fled their territories. There was also a nationalist aspect to the revolutions. A republic was set up by nationalists in Rome, and Charles Albert, the King of Piedmont – the one ruler in Italy who was definitely an Italian – declared war on Austria and called for independence for an Italian Union. Some believed that the Pope might be made head of a federation of Italian states.

Yet these hopes were soon dashed. French forces restored papal rule in Rome, and the Austrians defeated Piedmontese forces on the battlefield. It was becoming clear that nationalist movements were too weak and too divided among themselves, and that allies were needed to overcome Austrian control. It was also becoming clear that it was the hitherto politically backward state of Piedmont that had the best chance of spearheading the unification of Italy.

Piedmont and unification

Piedmont, under its king Victor Emmanuel II and its prime minister Camillo Cavour, grew stronger in the 1850s; and in 1859, having enlisted the help of the French Emperor, Napoleon III, it defeated Austria and formed the Kingdom of Northern Italy. Here was a successful measure of unification, although it was not altogether easy to say whether it was a result of Italian nationalism or Piedmontese imperialism.

The process might have stopped there, as many in the north looked upon the south of the peninsula as a backward and essentially foreign land. But Giuseppe Garibaldi – a swashbuckling military leader who was determined that the whole of Italy should be free and united – successfully wrested both Sicily and Naples from their Austrian king and, in 1860, handed them over to Victor Emmanuel. The Kingdom of Italy was formed in 1861, very much on the model of Piedmont; and soon the rest of the peninsula was added, Venice in 1866 and Rome, which became the new capital, in 1870, both as a result of diplomacy and Prussia's wars.

Interpretations

How do we make sense of the events that comprised Italian unification? One popular explanation has been to stress nationalism, the force of which produced the *Risorgimento*, a revival or awakening in Italy amounting to a national rebirth. Such an interpretation implies that Italy came into being not as a result of war and diplomacy and the actions of foreigners but, essentially, as a result of its own growth and the abilities and actions of Italians.

Many writers from the 1860s onwards have favoured the notion of *Risorgimento*, insisting that the timing of unification and the precise form that it took were determined by the exploits of Cavour and Garibaldi, the two greatest heroes of nineteenth-

Risorgimento

The word first came into use at the end of the eighteenth century and means 'resurgence' or 'rebirth'. Those who first used it suggested that Italian unification would be a noble and heroic affair, paralleling glorious episodes in Italian history such as the Roman Empire and the Renaissance.

Key term

Key question

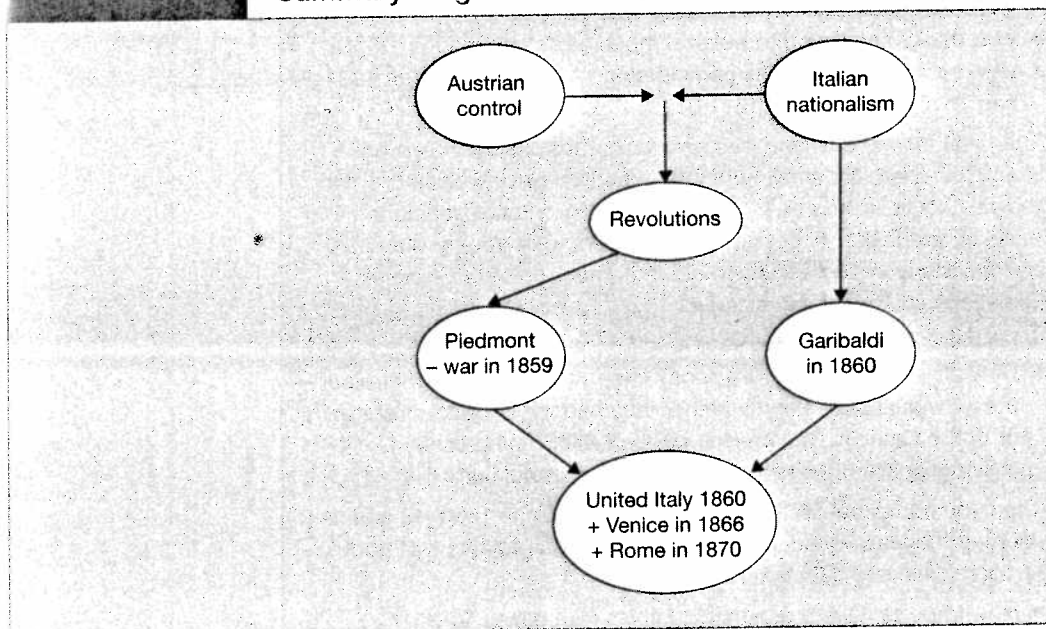
What is the fundamental division between historians on what caused Italian unification?

century Italian history. Their successful partnership brought the *Risorgimento* to a glorious conclusion. The essence of this interpretation is that Italians co-operated, and thus earned their own liberation from oppressive rule.

Most modern historians, however, especially from Britain, are far more sceptical. They cannot see the nationalist movement proceeding to an almost preordained and glorious unification, especially since the new Kingdom of Italy performed badly after 1861, and indeed succumbed to Mussolini's Fascist movement in the 1920s. They note continued divisions between the different nationalist groups during the 1850s and 1860s, the necessity for foreign help in defeating Austria, especially from France, and tend to see the unification of 1860 stemming not from the co-operation of Cavour and Garibaldi but from their rivalries and indeed hostility. In short, they emphasise **contingent** factors more than those Italian historians who still believe that the *Risorgimento* explains unification.

Key term **Contingent**
Subject to chance and to the effects of the unforeseen.

Summary diagram: Unification – a brief overview



Study Guide: AS Question

In the style of Edexcel

To what extent was lack of popular support the *main* obstacle to Italian unification in the period 1830–49? (30 marks)

Exam tips

The cross-references are intended to take you straight to the material that will help you to answer the question.

You would have 40 minutes to answer this question, or one like it, and therefore your factual knowledge needs to be sufficient for you to write several pages. Hence you could only tackle this question fully after you have read Chapter 2 of this book. Nevertheless it will help you to digest the information in the current chapter, and practise the vital skill of logical thinking, if you at least make an essay plan at this stage.

First you have to address the issue of popular support, or the lack of it. Questions you might address include:

- Was there mass discontent in Italy (see pages 6–7)?
- Was this channelled into political movements (see pages 13–15)?
- How important was mass participation in the revolutions of 1831–2 and 1848–9 (see pages 13–14)?

Then you should examine the barriers to unification. If they were weak, then perhaps small numbers of middle-class liberals or radicals could overcome them and unite Italy without generating mass support. But, of course, if the barriers were strong, then the nationalists were more likely to need the backing of the masses. Questions you might ask include:

- How was Italy divided by the Congress of Vienna (see pages 8–9)?
- How strong were these divisions? Here you might ask who ruled the individual states and whether they had the support of Austria or of the Catholic Church (see pages 8–9). Some precise information from the revolutions might be useful here.

Then you could look at the forces of nationalism in 1830–49 and ask whether their lack of success seemed to be due to a lack of popular support. Relevant questions include:

- How important were regional identities (see pages 10–11)?
- How many ‘nationalist’ movements were there by 1849? Are you sure they were really nationalist?

Next, you might consider what other barriers there were. The main one is lack of foreign support (see page 14).

Finally, do not forget to sum up the relative importance of the lack of popular support as an obstacle to unification. Here you must summarise your view as clearly as possible. Do you think it was the main obstacle? Might unification have been achieved if far more people had wanted it? Or would mass support have only been crucial only if, first, a single focus for Italian nationalism had existed? Or was mass support irrelevant in view of the might of the Austrian army? Perhaps the lack of French military support was far more crucial?